

Have you ever thought about
what a church is supposed to
be and **do**?

At East Madison Baptist Church we have and believe that the answer is found in the pages of Scripture. Our desire is for the Bible to dictate what kind of church we are becoming. This is why we make it our aim to **restore the primacy of God's Word to the leadership, life, and ministry of the local church.** Rather than reinvent the church, we are trying to be faithful to the Scriptural blueprint. The purpose of this booklet is to demonstrate God's design for His church by looking at what the Bible teaches about the church.

We begin in the book of Acts, where we are given a clear portrait of what the early disciples understood the church to be. It is a simple picture. They involved themselves in four activities: discipleship, fellowship, worship, and evangelism. These four activities serve as four biblical marks to evaluate any church. Each one will be teased out in the succeeding pages; however, for now a brief introduction is needed.

The first mark: making disciples

Luke informs us that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...(v.42).” Two things should be noted here: their devotion and what they were devoted to. The Greek word for devoted is *proskarteréo*, which means “to be constantly diligent” or even “to persevere.” These believers committed themselves to learning. In short, the early believers were students.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
Acts 2:42

We should note, however, that they were students of the apostle’s teaching. That was the content of their learning. For us today, this would be the canonized Scriptures. It’s important to see that they weren’t learning from workbooks, media content, or other secondary material. Instead they were learning from the word of God in its purest form. This is important because it is impossible to make disciples of Christ apart from the words of Christ (Matt.28:19-20).

The second mark: corporate worship

We are given three glimpses of worship in the early church. First, “they devoted themselves...to the breaking of [the] bread (v.42).” This is a reference to the Lord’s Supper. Second, they also “devoted themselves” to “the prayers (v.42).” Prayer is a prominent means of worshipping God in Scripture. Third, verse forty-six reads, that “day by day, [they were] attending the temple together...praising God...” The temple, of course, was the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. This doesn’t mean that

they reverted to the sacrificial system and Judaism. Instead, it points to a formal gathering for the purpose of worship (cf.1Cor.14:23). All of these elements indicate that the early Christians worshipped together.

The third mark: fellowship

Luke also tells us that “they devoted themselves to...the fellowship (v.42).” Then a bit later we read, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

The word translated as “fellowship” here is the oft repeated Greek word *koinonia*. It communicates the idea of *sharing something in common*. In fact, Luke explains here that their relationships were characterized by sharing. One example is that they were “selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” We will see later, though, that they shared much more.

The fourth mark: evangelism

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (v.47).” This simple statement serves to check two extremes that would cripple the church. The first extreme: “It’s God’s job to save, so we won’t do anything.” The second extreme: “A person’s salvation depends upon me.” But the early church was far from both extremes. In the previous section we read of Peter, who “with many...words bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation (v.40).” While Luke reminds us clearly that it is “the Lord [who] added to their number.”

We must be sure of this point: biblical evangelism involves *speaking* the gospel. Paul teaches us that the verbal witness is important--nearly essential--to salvation (Rom.10:13-15). This is what the apostles were engaged in, not only at Pentecost (2:37-41), but also throughout the book of Acts. We can assume that if the Lord was adding daily, then the early church was speaking the gospel daily as well.

These are the four marks that we strive to cultivate at EMBC. Before addressing each in a bit more detail, we need first to cover a fundamental philosophy of ministry. We need to answer the question, "*How* will we pursue these marks?"

Built by the Word

Jesus builds His church through the work of His Word and Spirit. Or to put it succinctly, the church is “built by the Word.” If we affirm the Bible’s infallibility, then we must also affirm its sufficiency. That is to say, we must trust that God will do what He claims He will do through His Word. The time has long since come for a new reformation; a return to the belief that God will use His Word to accomplish things that we cannot. This includes divine activities like making someone spiritually alive who was formerly dead and transforming people into the image of Christ. God accomplishes this through His Spirit and Word.

Over the past few decades the idea that man builds the church has crept into our ministry philosophies. We refer to “entrepreneurial

leaders” and market the gospel to spiritual consumers. Jesus, however, declared in unambiguous terms, “I will build My church.” This raises some important questions, How will He build it? Has He told us, or has He left it up to us to determine? As we said, Scripture teaches us that God builds the church through the ministry of His Spirit and His Word. The church’s task is to faithfully minister that Word. We turn now to Ephesians 4:12-16, where Paul explains clearly how this is done.

The Word is ministered to the church (vv.11-12).

Paul wrote “And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints...” Of these four offices, only the pastors and teachers remain. But the “pastors (*poimen*, shepherd) and teachers (*didaskaloi*)” are not two separate offices here; instead, they refer to one person. Paul has emphasized a specific function of the pastor’s office: teaching. This is certainly not the pastor’s only role, but Paul stresses here that it is his first and most important one. This doesn’t mean that the pastor is the only teacher in a local church; certainly God gives others the ability to teach. The point here, however, is that the pastor is the primary teacher. He is the pastor-teacher.

And He gave
the apostles,
the prophets,
the evangelists,
the pastors and
teachers to equip
the saints for the
work of ministry,
for building up the
body of Christ.
Eph.4:11-12

The rest of the passage explains why Scripture emphasizes this teaching role. Paul tells us that the pastor-teacher was given to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ...*” How does this happen? We should note carefully that it *does not* happen as the pastor applies marketing savvy or entrepreneurial skills. Such ideas are foreign to the text.

This passage aligns the pastor-teacher's role with the other offices of "apostles, prophets, and evangelists." He serves the same purpose as they—to proclaim God's Word. God works through the pastor-teacher to build His church as he fulfills his calling: ministering the Word to the church. Even a cursory reading of the Pastoral Epistles evidences this truth (e.g. 1Tim.4:6-16). Digesting a steady diet of sound doctrine is the best preventative for being "carried about" by false doctrine. This is how the pastor feeds the people of God.

The ministry of the Word builds the church (v.12).

Paul says that this ministry of the Word is "for the building up of the body of Christ...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." Make no mistake: God desires His church to grow. This is what Paul explains here by teaching us two important truths concerning the growth of a church. First, the church is built up by the external ministry of the Word. When the Word is preached and taught, the Spirit of God applies it to the heart (Jn.14:26; 15:26; 16:8,14; 1Cor.2:9-12; Heb.4:12-13). Apart from the internal work of the Spirit, there is simply no other way of spiritual growth: in numbers or in maturity. Only God causes real growth (1Cor.3:6-7) and He has decided how this will occur: through the ministry of His word (Rom.10:14-17; Heb.4:12-13). Through His word, God saves (2Tim.3:16; Acts2:37; (Rom.10:14-17; 1Thess.2:13; James 1:21; 1Pe.1:23,25) and sanctifies (2Tim.3:16-17; 2Cor3:18). God has not left us with another way to grow or build His church.

Second, God is concerned about church health. In other words, He seeks spiritual maturity, or in Paul's words "the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ." The true measuring stick for the growth of the church is not numerical but internal. Attracting crowds does nothing for the kingdom of God unless it results in true disciples. This was Jesus' command (Matt.28:19-20) and this is the biblical definition of church growth.

Concerning this subject, Charles Spurgeon once said, "If we add to our churches by becoming worldly, by taking in persons who have never been born again; if we add to our churches by accommodating the life of the Christian to the life of the worldling, our increase is worth nothing at all; it is a loss rather than a gain. If we add to our churches by excitement, by making appeals to the passions, rather than by explaining truth to the understanding; if we add to our churches otherwise than by the power of the Spirit of God making men new creatures in Christ Jesus, the increase is of no worth whatever."

The ministry of the Word creates grounded disciples (vv.13-14).

Paul says that the Word must be ministered "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." Paul makes his point here by way of contrasting what other methods produce: ships tossed by the sea. In short, apart from the ministry of the Word, a church is unstable at best. Such is the product of a ministry and a church not driven by the Word of God.

"...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
Eph.4:13

To the Corinthians, Paul writes "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2Cor.3:18)." The meaning of this verse is very simple: believers grow by looking intently at God. Or, to put it another way, when the Spirit teaches us about God from His word and then

applies that truth to our hearts, we grow. Make no mistake about it, grounded disciples are grown in the rich soil of the word of God (Matt.13:3-9, 18-23). Christ's desire is for every believer to know His truth, handle it properly, and be able to discern error. This is what Paul pictures here.

The Word of God is then ministered by the church (vv.15-16).

Next, Paul refers to the church "speaking the truth in love." Here we see that the ministry of the Word has been transferred from pastor to the people. Every believer has been given two ministries of the Word. First, the word is ministered from one believer to another believer. For instance, Paul exhorts every believer to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (Col.3:16)." The author of Hebrews commands us to "exhort one another...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (3:13)." The New Testament is full of this instruction (Eph.4:25-29; Gal.6:1; Eph.5:18-21; Rom.15:4). Ministry is not reserved for "trained professionals." On the contrary, every believer has a ministry to their brother and sister in Christ.

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ..."
Eph.4:15

Second, the word is ministered from the believer to unbeliever. Paul warns them against "human cunning...[and] craftiness in deceitful schemes." It is over against this false speech that he exhorts the church to "speak the truth." They are to hold forth a sound witness of the true gospel of God to the world. Every child of God is obligated to handle to gospel rightly and share it freely with a perishing world (Rom.1:14-17;

Col.4:5-6). Paul repeatedly asked for prayer that he would “declare the mystery of Christ (Col.4:2-4; Eph.6:19-20; 2Thess.3:1).”

To summarize, we will achieve these four marks by allowing the Word of God to inform, dictate, drive, and measure each. In other words, we will ask questions such as: “What does the Scripture say about how disciples are made?” “Are we following God’s Word in this area?” “What does the Bible teach us about how to worship God?” And “How does Scripture define evangelism?” This is how the church is built by the Word.

First mark: making disciples

Jesus commissioned His disciples to : “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matt.28:19-20).” Although this text is most commonly used as a plea for missionary service (and that is an appropriate use), Jesus’ desire is not that we simply go, but rather that we “make disciples.” This is our objective. He does not ask us to fill the seats and auditoriums, make people’s lives more enjoyable, entertain people, build large buildings, or even produce revenue. He does *command* the church to make disciples. If a church is not making disciples, then it is both unfruitful and unhealthy. This demands that we answer a few questions such as: What is a disciple? Where does discipleship occur? How do we go about making disciples? and How do we measure success? Let’s return to Ephesians to answer these questions.

What is a disciple?

The Greek word for disciple means a learner. A disciple is one who is committed to the teachings of someone else. That commitment is measured by their obedience. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (Jn.14:15).”

Furthermore, a disciple of Christ is a believer who is growing into Christ-likeness—they are becoming like Christ. But then we may ask, What does this look like? In what way are we expected to grow? The growth that God is concerned with is more than simply a change in behavior; instead, it is a spiritual transformation. This transformation of character is one that

occurs inwardly, but is evidenced outwardly. Paul says that they will [1] be busy performing “the work of ministry (v.12),” [2] they will be increasing in their knowledge of God (v.13),” thereby enabling spiritual discernment (v.14),” and [3] they will “speak the truth in love” to their brothers and sisters and the lost (v.15).

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
Matt.28:19-20

Where does discipleship occur?

Paul clearly teaches us that discipleship occurs within the local church, which He calls “the body of Christ.” But lest we think he has left it up to Para-church ministry, small group Bible studies, and televangelists, he also mentions the “pastor-teacher.” The Greek word translated as “pastor” is *poimen*, which means “shepherd.” As we read the rest of the

New Testament it becomes clear that the pastoral office is exercised within a local church. It is in this fellowship of believers that discipleship occurs.

In his letters, Paul stresses the importance of the local church so much that a definite principle arises: the local church is critical to your spiritual maturity. We have already observed how God has designed the local church so that the Word is ministered to His people [1] by the pastor—and other teachers (vv.11-12) and also [2] by the people to one another (v.15). But there is more. Among other things, the church provides every believer with spiritual protection from false teaching, spiritually nourishing fellowship, accountability, and opportunities to exercise their spiritual gifts and perform the work of ministry. Each of these is essential to your spiritual maturity. The bottom line here is that God’s design is for growth to occur within the local church. All other avenues of growth should supplement, not supplant, your involvement with a local church.

How do we go about making disciples?

The most fundamental and non-negotiable element of making disciples is biblical teaching. Apart from this, there can be no lasting spiritual transformation. This is how God has chosen to do it: by His Spirit, through His Word. Pastors and all other teachers minister the Word externally through preaching and teaching.

Before we think that the church is simply a classroom, Paul includes the “work of ministry.” A little later he speaks of “each part...working properly (v.16).” God has designed the body of Christ so that every believer is expected to work. Earlier in this letter, Paul made it clear that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph.2:10).” Elsewhere he says that the Word of God teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains in righteousness so that believers are “competent, equipped

for every good work (2Tim.3:16-17).” It is important for us to see that when the knowledge of God is applied to the heart it produces an inner transformation which *creates* servants from the inside out.

The saints are equipped and prepared to do the work of the ministry by the ministry of the Word. Pastoral motivation only goes so far and its effects are only temporary; however, the Scriptures describe something quite different. As the Word is ministered, the Spirit of God equips us by applying that word to our hearts and mind, thereby renewing us inwardly and enabling us to serve sacrificially (2Tim.3:16-17). The work of the ministry is merely the practical application of the Word.

How do we measure success?

This is *the* question in the contemporary church. Some say we must count the numbers; other say that we must gauge the number of ministries a church is involved in; still others assert that it’s the size of your buildings. Paul answers the question like this: “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v.13).” In other words, God measures growth by the people who are *growing up*—that is spiritually maturing and deepening in the faith.

Whenever we think of success, we are prone to look on the outside; upon the external. We look at numbers, dollars, programs, and buildings. Not so with God. He measures us according to a spiritual standard: His Son. This is clear from our present text, “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (vv.12-13; cf.vv.22-24; Rom.8:29; 2Cor.3:18; Col.3:9-11). If every chair were filled in our building and our budget was met—or even surpassed—each week it would not be an indication that we have been making disciples. We must measure success by God’s standard, which is spiritual growth. We must learn to ask questions like: “Do we still criticize, bite, and devour?” “Are our men loving their wives

as Christ loved the church?” “Was God glorified in our response to this or that trial?” Such answers will give a better indication of growth than numbers, money, and programs ever will.

What does this mean for discipleship at EMBC?

1. The ministry of the Word will drive all aspects of our church.
2. We will be committed to sound, biblical theology.
3. We will cultivate a biblical environment in which growth is expected rather than optional.

Second mark: corporate worship

God does not think lightly of worship. He takes it very seriously. This is evidenced many places in Scripture. For example, the book of Leviticus is devoted to instructions on *how* to worship. Nadab and Abihu were punished for unworthy worship (Lev.10:1-4). And the psalms served as a worship book for the saints of old. Since God takes it quite seriously and created us for that purpose, it only follows that we should be intentional in our worship. Let's turn our attention to the question of corporate worship. We are making a distinction here between private worship—what you do personally during the week—and corporate worship—what occurs when the people of God gather. The Bible provides us with six elements that should be present in corporate worship.

Preaching and teaching

In Acts 2:42 we read that “they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching (cf. 1Cor.14:29; 1Tim.4:6,11, 13; 2Tim.4:2).” Scripture is clear that corporate worship is the context for preaching and teaching (Neh.8:8; 1Tim.4:6,11; 2Tim.4:2). Preaching is neither a conversation nor motivational talk. Instead, it is the proclamation of what God has revealed about Himself to His people. God is the subject of the Scripture; therefore, He should be the subject of preaching and teaching.

Public reading of Scripture

Not only did the early church learn from Scripture as it was preached and taught, but also as it was read aloud. Paul exhorts Timothy along these lines, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching (1Tim.4:13; cf. Co.4:16).” Notice the distinction that is made between “reading” and “teaching.”

Why do this? If we preach the word, then it is accompanied by the preacher’s thoughts. If we sing the word, then it is accompanied by music. If we pray the word, then it is accompanied by the prayer’s most heartfelt desires. But when we simply read the word, something unique occurs. By devoting time in worship to read through the Scriptures--without exposition or comment--we have the benefit of hearing the unadulterated Word of God. We allow our hearts and minds to soak in the very Word which God has promised is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb.4:12).”

Sacrificial fellowship

In Acts 2, we read that “they devoted themselves to...the fellowship (Acts2:42).” Then later, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, *attending the temple together* and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people (vv.44-46).” It is clear that the early believers experienced meaningful fellowship within the context of worship. We can assume that this fellowship is the same thing mentioned in Hebrews: “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...(10:24-25).”

Regularly observing the Lord’s Supper

Luke informs us that the early church also “devoted themselves to...the breaking of bread (v.42).” The presence of a definite article (“the”) in verse 42 points to a formal observance rather than an informal meal. They were devoted to “*the* breaking of bread.” Most likely this indicates the meal instituted by Christ on the evening before His death—what we call the Lord’s Supper. Jesus said “Do this in remembrance of Me (Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:20,23-26). While Scripture nowhere mandates a number of times to observe this sacred meal, Christ did say “as *often* as you drink it...(1Cor.11:25).” From this we can at least gather a regular observance.

For as often as
you eat this bread
and drink the cup,
you proclaim the
Lord’s death until
He comes.
1Cor.11:26

Prayer

Luke tells us that the first Christians “devoted themselves to...the prayers (v.42).” Again the definite article indicates something more formal than private prayer. Given the context we can assume that corporate prayer occurred when the church gathered to worship (cf.Eph.6:17-18; Col.4:2; 1Tim.2:1-4). When we pray corporately we are lifting up our voices together with one voice to God (Acts 4:24). Even though only one person may pray at a time, the one praying intercedes on behalf of everyone present. He stands as a representative of the body before the very throne of God.

Praising God with song

Luke also says that “all who believed were together...and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they...[were] *praising* God.” The church should be characterized by praise. While this Acts passage doesn’t say that their praise was in the form of song, other New Testament texts do. This is what Paul exhorts both the Ephesians (Eph.5:18-20) and the Colossians (Col.3:16) to do. This is the model for corporate gatherings which we find throughout the Psalms (e.g. 145:1-3; 146:1-2;147:1; 150)--for “great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised (145:3).”

In his book *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott comments on the uniqueness of Christian praise. There we read, ““A Buddhist temple never resounds with a cry of praise. Mohammedan worshippers never sing...They are never jubilant with the songs of the forgiven.”” He explains that the reason is because “(Allah’s) forgiveness has to be earned and is never bestowed as a free gift on the undeserving...By contrast, whenever Christian people come together it is impossible to stop them singing. The Christian community is a community of celebration.” Praising God with song is an essential of corporate worship.

What does this mean for worship at EMBC?

1. We will maintain the primacy of worship in church life.
2. We will intentionally order our worship according to the six Scriptural principles previously mentioned.
3. We will cultivate an atmosphere for worship that is God-centered, Christ-exalting, and Word-saturated.
4. We will take worship seriously.

Third mark: fellowship

How has the church changed since the first century? How have our ideas and attitudes been transformed by the world? In America, we value time, luxury, personal space, and independence. We value the “pursuit of happiness” and the American dream--which mean investing in ourselves. We value retirement and nest eggs. We value stuff: cars, homes, toys, and money to spend on things we don’t need. These are the things that Americans value; things they hold dear and even lust for. These are also all things which the early church shunned--even rejected at times.

In many ways, however, the American church resembles our American culture. For example, we value time; therefore, we must restrict our fellowship. There are many who refuse to gather for worship but once a week. We value luxury and personal comforts, which render us incapable of volunteering to work with kids, stay in a nursery, or overextend ourselves for Christ’s body.

We value independence, individualism, and personal space, so we won't ask for help when we are suffering spiritually and we certainly don't want anyone intruding into our lives without being asked. We value the idea of retirement, so we think it's our right to simply stop serving the body of Christ once we reach a predetermined age. But the early church radically rejected American values and the selfish attitudes that it breeds. They understood that true Christian fellowship means sharing your life with your brothers and sisters. It means rejecting individualism and selfishness. Nowhere is this clearer than in the second chapter of Acts.

Verse 42 reads, "And they devoted themselves to...fellowship" The original language reads "the *koinonia*," which communicates the idea of *sharing something in common*. Once again the original Greek inserts a definite article which seems to indicate something more formal; perhaps recognition of its importance. Nevertheless, this passage provides a glimpse into the nature of "the fellowship." We see four ways a church should fellowship.

The church fellowships by sharing themselves with one another (v.42).

"They devoted themselves...to the fellowship." A couple of verses later Luke adds to this, saying "And all who believed were together and had all things in common (v.44)." The early Christians placed the highest priority upon gathering together. We must not think that they had nothing else to do. On the contrary, they had families, jobs, and other responsibilities as we do today (e.g. Eph.4:28; 1Thess.4:11; 1Tim.5:8). How then could they afford the time to "devote" themselves to one another? Paul answers this question by writing, "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Rom.12:5)." There's the key: because they belonged to one another, they were *obligated* to share life with one another. They actually believed that they were brothers and sisters to one another.

The church fellowships by sharing their possessions with one another (vv.44-45).

They “were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (v.44-45).” The early church viewed their possessions not as an end, but as a means to glorify their God.

There is a profound truth here that we dare not miss. The believers weren’t just giving a weekly tithe or merely helping those in need. “They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” In other words, they earned money just so they could give it away. It is one thing to give of your excess. It is still a better thing to give from your own poverty. But what does it say about you that you would actually *make money* in order to give it away.

This is completely contrary to the American mindset. We are proud of our purchases and investments because one day they will provide a nest egg or something special just for us. But here we are told that the early church sold those investments just to give them away (Acts 4:34). Now some might call that foolish or too risky, but Christ says that it is wise (Mk.8:35). In fact, it reveals what is in our hearts (Matt.6:19-20). This is true not only of individual believers, but of the church as a body.

The church fellowships by sharing Christ with one another (v.46).

Luke tells us that they were “day by day attending the temple together...(v.46)” That they attended the temple indicates that their worship retained a formal significance. Having already discussed the importance of corporate worship, let’s focus upon the quality of their interaction with one another. Each Christian has an obligation to their

brothers and sisters; they are to exhort them on to spiritual growth and maturity. In Ephesians, Paul says this role is accomplished by “speaking the truth in love.”

This is the overwhelming testimony of Scripture. We are to speak words that build one another up (Eph.4:29) and engage one another in Christ-centered, spiritually edifying conversation (Eph.5:18-21; Col.3:16). We are to encourage one another (Heb.10:25) and “consider how to stir one another to love and good works (Heb.10:24). We are to implore one another “that none may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb.3:13).” When we see sin in someone’s life, we are to confront them (Col.3:16; Eph.4:25). If they continue in sin, we are to gently restore them (Gal.6:1-2). If they refuse to repent, they are to be disciplined (Matt.18:15-20). All of this comprises another essential part of fellowship.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
Col.3:16

The church fellowships by sharing their homes with one another (vv.46-47).

Luke says they were “breaking bread together in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people (vv.46-47).” The picture provided here is one of brothers and sisters being welcomed into one another’s homes on a regular basis. This is an often missed component of biblical Christianity. Paul combines these ideas of sharing our possessions and

our homes by commanding us to “contribute to the needs of the saints *and* seek to show hospitality (Rom.12:13).” Elsewhere, Scripture emphasizes the importance of hospitality making it a pastoral requirement (1Tim.3:2) and also evidence of a widow’s good works (1Tim.5:10). Peter even presents it as a command: “show hospitality to one another without grumbling (1Pe.4:9).” Charles Spurgeon once said, “if you love the Master, love the servants.”

What does this mean for fellowship at EMBC?

1. We will illustrate the gospel by our sacrificial love for one another.
2. We will cultivate an environment of accountability and encouragement.
3. We will adopt a biblical understanding of church membership.
4. We will stir one another to love and good works.

Fourth mark: evangelism

The gospel is the precious message of the cross. It is the message that Christ suffered and died in our place. It is the message that His death satisfied the wrath of God and that His righteous works will be accepted instead of our own. It is this message that has been entrusted to the church. It is a most precious treasure, yet it seems strangely absent in the contemporary church. John Stott is so bold as to say, "All around us we see Christians and churches relaxing their grasp on the gospel, fumbling it, and in danger of letting it drop from their hands altogether (*Guard the Gospel*, 22)."

If we need proof, all we have to do is examine the way in which Christians handle the gospel. Many churches focus too much upon the

effects of sin rather than the root of sin and the *effects* of the gospel rather than the gospel itself. The church has discarded the gospel in favor of instant gratification and fallen prey to a traveling salesman called pragmatism. The church has brought into the corporate philosophy that results are what matters--the end justifies the means. In so doing, we have traded the power of God for a flash-in-the pan nugget of fool's gold.

...just as we have been entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

1Thess.2:4

Scripture is clear that the gospel is “the power of God (Rom.1:16).” And the church is called to guard the gospel (1Tim.6:20) and advance it by sharing it freely with a perishing world (Acts1:8). This is what we call evangelism and in First Thessalonians 2:1-13 we are given a complete picture of biblical evangelism.

Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel of God (vv.1-2).

“For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” Paul spoke of their boldness to “declare the gospel of God.” The gospel is referred to as “the gospel of God” many times in Scripture (1Thess.2:1,8,9; Mk.1:14; Rom.1:1; 15:16; 2Cor.11:7; 1Pe.4:17). This simply means that the content of their witness was the gospel which *belonged* to God.

Most of us can understand the proclamation aspect of evangelism, but what is often times neglected is the content of our message. Content is of the utmost importance and we do not have liberty to change the content in any shape, form, or fashion. To do so would be to proclaim “a different gospel (Gal.1:6-8).” Seeing this then, we must ensure that we

understand the message if there is to be faithful communication. Our message is the gospel of God, which is inherently God-centered.

What we are saying here is that biblical evangelism is not concerned with a person's style, a method, or a particular event. Evangelism is concerned simply with sharing verbally the message of the cross. J.I. Packer wrote, "Evangelism is to be defined, not institutionally, in terms of the kind of meeting held, but theologically, in terms of what is taught, and for what purpose (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 57)." Theology is everything with regards to evangelism because if our theology is wrong, then we will be misrepresenting God.

Evangelism needs a messenger to carry the message (vv.1-4).

"For you yourselves know, brothers, that our *coming to you* was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict...*we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel...*"

Here we see three aspects of the messenger. [1] They have been "approved by God;" [2] they are "entrusted with the gospel;" and [3] they go to those who need to hear the message. Every Christian meets these requirements. In fact, we have been especially commissioned by Christ to go. And we go everyday; we are always on the go. What is missing from most of our going is a gospel priority which should be applied to every relationship we have. But why?

Scripture teaches us over and over again a simple truth about the unbeliever, and it is summed up by Paul as he writes, "no one seeks for God (Rom.3:11)." They do not seek God because [1] their desires are corrupted (Eph.2:3; 4:22); [2] their minds are blinded (Eph.4:17-18; Rom.1:21-22; 8:6-7); and [3] their wills are in bondage to sin—they are

slaves of sin (Jn.8:34; 2Pe.2:19; Rom.3:12). They will not come to God; instead, He sends us to them as His ambassadors.

Evangelism depends upon the work of God (vv.1-6).

Paul continues, “we had boldness *in our God* to declare to you *the gospel of God* in the midst of much conflict.” The evangelist relies upon the power of God, which is the gospel. He does not rely upon crafty or emotional appeals. In chapter one, Paul says, “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (vv.4-5).” The result of God’s work within them is that “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath the come (vv.9-10).” This is a remarkable turn-around, considering what we have already learned about the unbeliever. Perhaps, one more description would serve to cement our thoughts though:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph.2:1-3).

How can such a radical change take place? Will the diligent application of marketing techniques get the job done? No, Paul is quite clear about the *how*. He says, in the very next sentence:

But **God**, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (v.4).

Nothing can break the power of sin in our lives, remove the veil from our eyes, and cause us to seek out God but God Himself. This is precisely what Paul and his co-workers knew. It is why they relied solely upon the Spirit of God to work as they spoke the Gospel of God (Rom.1:16; 2Cor.4:3-6).

Had they not relied upon the power of God the missionaries would have had to resort to other tactics. Paul mentions several such man-centered approaches. They could have made their “appeal” [1] “from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive (v.3);” [2] they could have tried to “please man (v.4);” [3] they could have used “words of flattery (v.5);” [4] they could have had a “pretext for greed (v.5);” [5] they could have sought “glory from people (v.6);” or [6] they “could have made demands as apostles of Christ (v.6).” They rejected these approaches and relied instead upon the gospel of God and the power of God to work in the hearts of the Thessalonians. Because of this, they were free to “speak not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”

Evangelism explains and teaches the gospel (vv.7-12).

“But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, *while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God*. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you

And
Paul...reasoned
with the from the
Scriptures,
explaining and
proving that it
was necessary for
the Christ to suffer
and to rise from
the dead...
Acts 17:2-3

believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we *exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you* to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

Just how long were the missionaries in Thessalonica? In Acts, Luke tells us they stayed at least three Sabbaths, but Paul alludes to a longer stay. While he does not speak of their length of stay in the city, he does say that they stayed long enough [1] to earn money by providing a service (2:9), [2] for the Thessalonians to “become very dear” to them, and [3] to receive two gifts from the Philippians (Phil.4:16). So they probably stayed longer than a month but not as long as in other places (more than a year in Corinth).

This makes a difference because during his stay Paul “proclaimed...the gospel of God,” “exhorted each one,” “encouraged,” and “charged” them. But which one of these should we consider evangelism? Paul considered all of it to be evangelism for not only did he proclaim the gospel, but he also taught it and explained it to them. The missionaries evangelized the whole time by declaring the gospel, exhorting and teaching it during their length of stay.

Paul understood his calling as being “appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher” of “the gospel (1Tim.1:10-11).” He says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ (Col.1:28).”

Will Metzger writes “So often we are told to think of the gospel in terms of a simple plan of salvation with three or four basic facts. Yet the mandate our Lord gave to us was ‘teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matt.28:20)...Is this simple approach adequate? Are we to reduce and package the gospel for easy distribution? Are we to imagine that Paul merely parroted the words, ‘Jesus Christ crucified,’ up and down the streets of Corinth? No. Each of these words is like the tip of an iceberg rising above the water. Underneath is a large mass of assumptions and deep meanings (*Tell the Truth*, 29).” Teaching, reasoning, and explaining are important parts of evangelism.

What does this mean for evangelism at EMBC?

1. We will maintain a biblical understanding of the gospel and salvation.
2. We will cultivate an atmosphere of evangelism—where it is encouraged, expected, and lost souls are prayed for.
3. We will place a priority on already existing relationships where we can proclaim, exhort, and teach the word of the cross.

A final word

So then, we must ask ourselves, Why do ministry this way? Why not give in to the pressure of worldly wisdom and business models? Haven't those methods been proven to pack in the crowds and fill up the offering plate? The answer is simple: God's power is not found in the craftiness and cleverness of men; nor is it found in visionary leadership and persuasive marketing. Paul tells us in as simple terms as possible that "the word of the cross...is the power of God (1Cor.1:18)."

Quite simply, our message is what defines us. We are neither a social club nor a for-profit organization. Neither are we a people wholly concerned with culture and relevancy. In fact, one way to guarantee

our *irrelevancy* is to discard the message of Christ crucified for that is what the world needs most. The message of the church is essential and we need to be regularly reminded why. Paul explains this in his first letter to the Corinthians.

The Corinthian culture was not too dissimilar to ours. They were concerned far too much with presentation, or “words of eloquent wisdom.” Their culture of rhetoric had cultivated a love of form and showy speech. They were impressed with what sounded good to the ear. Paul recognized that there was a great danger of such oration overshadowing the content of the message. Knowing this, he countered by asserting that *content is everything*. His content was “the gospel...the cross of Christ...[and] the word of the cross.” He was so convinced of this that he chose “not to speak with words of eloquent wisdom.” In fact, he declared “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2:2).” Why would he adopt such an approach? Especially in view of the fact that showy speech was what the people were accustomed to. Certainly it would have been considered culturally relevant. In fact, it would have guaranteed him an audience. Didn’t Paul care about those things? His answer is simple: he did not want to empty the cross of its power. Without the *content* of the cross there is no power.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lets the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”
1Cor.1:17

If Paul had tried to impress his listeners they would have missed the whole point of the message. If they did profess faith, it would have rested in the wisdom of men rather than in the power of God (2:4-5; Rom.1:16-17).

Whenever we make more of presentation than we do of the Word, we can empty the cross. Whenever we put ourselves on display in hopes of

appearing cool or relevant, we can empty the cross. And whenever we make too much of felt needs and emotional responses we can empty the cross. The one way that we can be sure not to do this is to simply preach the word, allowing God to speak for Himself.

There is no power in cultural relevancy. There is no power in showy presentations and in winsome personality. There is no power in seeker-sensitive services and drama and dance routines. There is no power in the emotional appeals of music. The power is in the word of the cross (Rom.1:16-17).

This does not mean that there is no value in understanding culture and in relating to the lost; certainly Paul did both. However, if we make too much of any of this and--in turn--make little of the cross, then we have only succeeded in emptying the cross of its power. And the sad result is that we produce converts and disciples to a method rather than regenerated sinners. When people come each week just to hear a great speaker, or see a show, or sing songs that make them feel good they are merely disciples of a particular method of ministry.

God desires--yes, is seeking--people who worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn.4:24). May we never empty the cross of its power. Instead, the word of the cross must be sounded forth in our message and song. It must be demonstrated in our sacrificial fellowship; it must be the transforming word of our discipleship; and it must be shared freely with those who are everyday in danger of the terrible wrath of God.



If the church is to fulfill her great commission then it is imperative that we reject shallow and worldly methods to make disciples because this will only produce shallow and worldly-minded people. In order to do this, we must be willing to examine everything the church does in terms of what God has said through His Word.

Then we must reform those things which do not measure up to that standard. Only when we restore the primacy of God's Word to the leadership, life, and ministry of the local church will we be able to truly make disciples in a way that is glorifying to God.

Below are twenty-five questions we must routinely ask of East Madison Baptist Church. Our honest answers will enable us to identify spiritual problems and move towards spiritual health. We must keep before us our aim to live with an overflowing passion for God's glory.

Discipleship

1. Is the Word being faithfully ministered by our pastor and teachers?
2. Are there areas of our church life (leadership, decision making, practice, etc.) that is not regulated by the Word of God?
3. What are some concrete ways that our body addresses sin?
4. Are there any identifiable patterns of sin in our midst?
5. What are the ways in which your spiritual maturity is encouraged, cultivated, and expected?
6. Does our theology contradict Scripture on any point?

Worship

7. Does the pastor's preaching explain the biblical text?
8. In what ways do we humble ourselves before the Lord in worship?
9. Do our songs accomplish these God-centered goals: teaching about God, rejoicing in the cross, and directing our thoughts to God?
10. Is our worship consistent with Scripture? In what ways?
11. What is our attitude while observing the Lord's Supper?
12. Do we saturate our worship gathering with prayer?
13. How is Christ exalted during our worship?

Fellowship

14. In what ways are we regularly sacrificing for one another?
15. Are we talking about the things of God in our conversations with one another?
16. Do we confront sin in one another? Do we speak the truth in love?
17. Do we seek to build one another up with our words?
18. In what ways are we ministering the Word to one another?
19. Are we regularly sharing our homes with one another?

Evangelism

20. How does the Gospel direct our church?
21. What are some concrete ways that we proclaim the Gospel in our community?
22. How often do we pray for the souls of unbelievers?
23. How is evangelism encouraged and expected?
24. How does our understanding of the Gospel affect our witness?
25. What are some ways that our church assists us in proclaiming the Gospel on a daily basis?